

Sūrah Al-Falaq

(Break of Dawn)

This Sūrah is Madanī, and it has 5 verses

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

With the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful

Verses 1 - 5

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ ﴿١﴾ مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ ﴿٢﴾ وَمِنْ شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ ﴿٣﴾ وَمِنْ شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ ﴿٤﴾ وَمِنْ شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ ﴿٥﴾

Say, "I seek refuge with the Lord of the daybreak [1] from the evil of everything He has created, [2] and from the evil of the dark night when it penetrates, [3] and from the evil of the women who blow on the knots, [4] and from the evil of an envier when he envies. [5]

Preliminary Remarks

This and the next Sūrah were revealed on the same occasion, and in the same event, as will be explained in the 'cause of revelation'. Ḥāfiẓ Ibn-ul-Qayyim has, therefore, written their commentary together. He writes that their blessings and benefits are abundant. All of the people require them and no one can dispense with them. They are very efficacious remedy for sorcery or magical spell, evil eye, and for all of the physical and spiritual calamities. In fact, if its reality is grasped fully, people will understand that they require it more than their breath, food, water, clothing and everything else.

Cause of Revelation

Musnad of Ahmad records that a Jewish person cast a magical spell on the Holy Prophet ﷺ, as a result of which he fell ill. Jibra'īl عليه السلام came

to him and informed him that a particular Jew had cast a spell on him, that he had tied knots in his hair to accomplish this objective, and it is thrown into a particular well. The Holy Prophet ﷺ sent some of his Companions to bring it from the well Jibra'il عليه السلام had described. The Holy Prophet ﷺ untied the knots, and he was instantly cured. Jibra'il عليه السلام informed him of the name of the Jew and the Holy Prophet ﷺ knew the culprit, but it was not in keeping with his compassionate disposition to avenge anyone in his personal matter. Therefore, this was never brought to the attention of the Jew guilty of the black magic, nor did any sign of complaint ever appear on the blessed face of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Being a hypocrite, he regularly attended the Holy Prophet's ﷺ gatherings.

The details of this incident are recorded in Sahih of Bukhari on the authority of Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضي الله عنها that a Jewish man cast a magic spell on the Holy Prophet ﷺ, as a result of which he sometimes felt confused whether or not he had done something. One day the Holy Prophet ﷺ said to Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضي الله عنها that Allah has shown him what his illness was and added: "Two men came to me in my dream. One of them sat by my head side while the other sat by my feet, and the following conversation ensued:

Question: 'What is wrong with this man?'

Answer: 'He is bewitched.'

Question: 'Who has bewitched him?'

Answer: 'Labīd Ibn A'sam. He is a member of the tribe of Banū Zura'iq who is an ally of the Jews, a hypocrite.'

Question: 'With what did he bewitch him?'

Answer: 'With a comb and hair from the comb.'

Question: 'Where is the comb?'

Answer: 'In the dried bark of a male date palm under a rock in a well called *Dharwan*.'

Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضي الله عنها says that the Holy Prophet ﷺ went to the well to remove the comb with the hair and said: "This is the well I was shown in my dream." He removed it from the well. Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضي الله عنها asked

the Holy Prophet ﷺ: "Will you not make this public?" He replied: "Allah has cured me and I hate to cause harm to anyone." This implies that the Holy Prophet ﷺ did not want to be the cause anyone's molestation, death or destruction, because this is what would have exactly happened if the incident was publicised.

According to a narration in Musnad of Aḥmad, this illness of the Holy Prophet ﷺ lasted for six months. According to other narratives, some of the Companions knew that this wicked act was performed by Labid Ibn A'sam, and they courteously said to the Holy Prophet ﷺ: "Why should we not kill this wicked person?" He made the same reply to them as he did to Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضي الله عنها. According to Imām Tha'labī's narration, a Jewish boy was the attendant of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, the hypocritical Jew flattered the boy and talked him into getting for him strands of the Prophet's ﷺ hair from his comb, and a few of its teeth. Having obtained these items, he tied eleven knots on a string and a needle was stuck into each knot. Labīd then placed this spell in the spathe of a male palm tree, and buried it under a stone in a well. On this occasion, the two Sūrahs were revealed, comprising eleven verses. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ recited one verse at a time and untied one knot each time, until all the knots were untied, and he felt freed from the tension of the witchcraft. [All these narratives have been adapted from Ibn Kathīr.]

Magic and its effect on the Holy Prophet ﷺ

Some people are surprised that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ should be affected by black magic. This is because some people do not have a complete grasp of how magic operates. It actually operates under physical causes, and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was not immune to the influence of physical causes, as for instance feeling the burning or heating sensation of fire, and feeling the cooling sensation of water; or certain natural factors causing fever or body temperature to rise; or other factors causing aches and pains, and other illnesses. The Holy Prophet ﷺ, or any other prophet for that matter, was not immune to the effects of such natural or physical causes. They can be affected by the hidden operations of magic which are no less natural or physical. Please see Sūrah Al-Baqarah, Ma'āriful Qur'ān, Vol. 1/ pp 264-278 for fuller explanation, especially p. 276 on 'Magic and Prophets'.

***Mu'awwadhatain* are Sūrahs that afford protection against physical and spiritual afflictions**

It is a settled doctrine of every believer that Allah is the intrinsic cause of every gain and loss in this world as well as in the next world. Without the Divine will not a jot of gain or loss can be caused to anyone. The only way to fortify against all physical and spiritual injuries and harm is for man to place himself under the protection of Allah, and by his actions he should attempt to make himself capable of entering the Divine shelter.

Sūrah Al-Falaq directs how to seek the Divine protection against worldly calamities, and Sūrah An-Nās tells the way to seek Divine protection against the calamities of the Hereafter.

Virtues of *Mu'awwadhatain*

Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim records a Tradition on the authority of Sayyidnā 'Uqbah Ibn 'Āmir رضي الله عنه who reports that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Do you not see that there have been revealed to me verses tonight the like of which has not been seen before? Those are Sūrah Al-Falaq and Sūrah An-Nās." According to another narration, the like of *Mu'awwadhatain* has not revealed even in Torah, Injīl, or Zabūr or anywhere else in the Qur'ān. Another narration of Sayyidnā 'Uqbah Ibn 'Āmir رضي الله عنه reports that the Messenger of Allah taught him *Mu'awwadhatain* while they were on a journey. Then he recited them in the *maghrib ṣalāh* and said: "Recite these two Sūrahs whenever you go to sleep and whenever you get up." [Nasā'ī] According to another report, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ has advised people to recite these two Sūrahs after every *ṣalāh* [Transmitted by Abū Dāwūd and Nasā'ī].

Imām Mālik recorded from Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضي الله عنها: "whenever the Messenger of Allah ﷺ suffered from an ailment, he would recite the *Mu'awwadhatain*, blow over his hands, and then wiped his whole body with those hands. When his pain became acute on his death-bed, I would recite the *Mu'awwadhatain*, blow over his hands, and then he wiped them over himself, because my hands could not be the fitting substitute for his blessed hands. [All these narratives have been adapted from Ibn Kathīr].

Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh Ibn Khubayb رضي الله عنه reports that it was raining one night and the sky had become intensely dark. We went out looking for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and when he was found, he said: "Say ." He

asked: "What should I say?" He said: "Recite **قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ** and *Mu'awwadhatain*. Reciting them thrice in the morning and thrice in the evening will fortify you against all kinds of perturbations."

In sum, it was the practice of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and his Companions to recite these two Sūrahs to protect themselves against all types of privations, trials and tribulations of life in this world, as well as of life in the next world.

Lexicological Analysis of important words and interpretation of the Sūrah

Verse [113:1] **قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ** (Say, "I seek refuge with the Lord of the Daybreak.") The word *falaq* means 'to split or cleave' and here it is used in the sense of 'break of dawn'. In another verse, a similar quality of Allah is used in [6:96] **فَالِقُ الْإِصْبَاحِ** ([He is] the One who causes the dawn to break). Of all the Divine attributes, this particular attribute is used presumably because the darkness of night often causes evils and difficulties, and the daylight removes them. This attribute of Allah points to the fact that anyone who seeks protection in Allah, He will remove all afflictions from him. [Maḏharī]

The word *Sharr*: 'Allāmah Ibn Qayyim's Exposition

Verse [113:2] **مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ** (From the evil of everything He has created.) 'Allāmah Ibn Qayyim expounds that the word *sharr* (evil) is employed in two different senses: [1] pain, loss, injury, trouble, grief, distress and affliction which affect man directly, and they are by themselves troubles and afflictions; and [2] the factors that cause losses, injuries and afflictions. The second type covers unbelief, idolatry and all sins. The things from which the Qur'ān and Sunnah require man to seek refuge in Allah are either of these two types. The Traditional supplication that is *masnūn* after *ṣalāh* includes seeking of refuge from four things: [1] punishment of the grave; [2] punishment of the Hell-Fire; [3] hardships and privations of life; and [4] trials and tribulations of death. Of these, the first two are afflictions and punishments in their own right, and the last two are causes of afflictions and punishments.

Verse [113:2] **مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ** (From the evil of everything He has created) covers the evil of the entire creation. This verse was sufficient to guard against all mischief and calamities. But three particular forms of evil have

been singled out to seek protection which often cause calamities and afflictions.

The first thing singled out appears in verse [113:3] وَمِنْ شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ (and from the evil of dark night when it penetrates.) The word *ghāsiq* is derived from *ghasaq* (to become dark or intensely dark). Thus Sayyidnā Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنه, Ḥasan and Mujāhid say that the word *ghasiq* stands for 'night'. The verb *waqaba* is derived from *wuqūb* which means for utter darkness 'to overspread completely and intensely'. The verse means : 'I seek refuge in Allah from the night when its darkness has completely and intensely overspread'. The word 'night' has been specifically mentioned because this is the time when Jinn, Satans, harmful insects, animals and reptiles appear. Thieves and robbers emerge at this time to carry out their crimes of stealing and other acts of wickedness. The enemies attack at this time. Black magic has the worst effect when it is intensely dark at night. As soon as the dawn approaches, the effects of all these things disappear and fade away. [‘Allāmah Ibn Qayyim]

Verse [113:4] وَمِنْ شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ (and from the evil of the women who blow on the knots.) The word *naffāthāt* is derived from *naftḥ* which means 'to blow'. The word *‘uqad* is the plural of *‘uqdah* which means 'a knot'. The magicians usually tie knots on a string or piece of thread, recite magical incantations or formulae and blow on them as they do so. The phrase *النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ* (...the women who blow on the knots) refers to female magicians. It is possible that the pre-adjectival noun of the adjective *naffāthāt* be *nufūs* [souls]. Thus this verse may be translated as 'the evil souls who blow on knots'. This translation would include men and women who carry out this evil practice. But most probably its pre-adjectival noun is 'womenfolk'. Women have been specifically mentioned perhaps because generally womenfolk have the natural disposition to carry out the evil practice of witchcraft; or probably because Labīd Ibn A‘ṣam, whose black magic was the cause of revelation of this Sūrah, got this most heinous act done by his daughters. Hence, the act of witchcraft is ascribed to them.

The reason why protection is sought against magicians is firstly that the cause of revelation of these two Sūrahs was the incident of magic. Secondly, people are normally unaware of the act of magicians, and they do not pay attention to getting themselves exorcised. They are under the impression that it is some kind of medical ailment and try to get

themselves medically cured. In the meantime the magical effect continues to grow worse.

The third thing from which people are asked specifically to seek protection is *ḥasid* [jealous] and *ḥasad* [jealousy]. This has been specified for the same reasons as given above, because black magic was worked on the Prophet ﷺ on account of jealousy. The Jews and the hypocrites could not bear to see the rapid progress and expansion of Islam. They could not defeat him in outer combat; therefore they tried to satisfy their jealousy by performing witchcraft on him. There were uncountable number of green-eyed monsters against the Prophet ﷺ. That is the major reason why protection was sought against them. Jealousy of the jealous one gives him restless days and sleepless nights. He is at all times after causing loss to his envied person. Therefore, the harm he wishes to inflict is severe.

***Ḥasad* [Jealousy] and *Ghibṭah* [Envy]**

The Arabic word *Ḥasad*, the English equivalent of which is 'jealousy', is invariably used in the bad sense. It generally means to desire the deprivation of the other man rather than one's own acquisition of any bliss that he may possess. Simply put, *Ḥasad* means that a person should feel unhappy at the better fortune and good quality that Allah has granted to another, and wishes that it should be taken away from the other person and given to him, or at least the other should be deprived of it. *Ḥasad* in this sense is totally forbidden and a major sin. This is the first sin that was committed in the heaven and also the first one committed on the earth. The Iblīs was jealous of 'Ādam ﷺ in the heaven and the latter's son Qābīl was jealous of his brother Hābīl on earth. [Qurṭubī].

Ghibṭah, on the other hand, means to desire for oneself the same blessing as the other man has, without any idea of the latter's losing it. This is not only permissible but also desirable.

Summary and Conclusion

Apart from the general protection that is sought in this Sūrah, protection is sought from three specific evils. These are mentioned separately in verses three, four and five. Furthermore, in the first and the third specific evils particular restrictions are placed. The first specific evil *gḥḥūsiq* [darkness] is restricted by the phrase إِذَا وَقَبَ "when it penetrates".

The third specific evil *ḥāsīd* is restricted by the phrase إِذَا حَسَدَ "when he envies". The practice of witchcraft is left unrestricted because its harmful effect is general. The harmful effect of darkness is felt when there is total absence of light, plunging the night in intense and utter darkness. Likewise, jealousy may not cause harm to its object until the jealous one takes a practical step with word or deed to satisfy his heart. For until he takes a practical step, his being unhappy may be harmful to himself, but it is not harmful for the other person so that he may seek refuge from it. Hence, restrictions are placed on the first and the third specific evils.

Alḥamdulillah
The Commentary on
Sūrah Al-Falaq
Ends here